**This is the hardest thing I've ever written**

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**7 MIN READ**

**MAY 26, 2024**

What you’re about to read is very uncomfortable.  
   
It’s possibly the hardest thing I’ve ever written, but it needs to be said, and you need to read it.  
   
Wayne is a 50-something Barefoot Dad. His son Mackenzie (Mac) is 16 years old, and obsessed with footy, cricket and getting his L-plates. The trouble began when Mac befriended a girl on Snapchat who was friends with some of his friends.  
   
“Hi Sweety, what do you do?” she wrote.  
   
Mac told her that he was the captain of his footy team and that he liked to work out.  
   
She told him he looked like he had great abs, and then sent him a photo of her breasts.  
   
Mac responded by sending a nude photo … but without his head in the shot.  
   
She returned the favour, sending him a nude photo … also without her head in the shot. And after a few more minutes of flirting, they both sent nude photos of themselves with their heads in shot.  
   
Then Mac’s phone rang.  
   
On the other end of the line was a middle-aged man:  
   
“I’ve got your photo, and I’ve hacked your Snapchat. Mac, you are going to put $500 into this bank account in five minutes, or I will send it to all your contacts.  
   
“I’m counting”, he barked, then hung up.  
   
Mac immediately transferred $500 to the man’s bank account.  
   
And then Mac’s phone rang again.  
   
“Mac, I’ve got your $500. But now I want another $500. And if you don’t pay me another $500, you’re going to be embarrassed. Your parents will hate you, and you’ll want to kill yourself”, he snarled before hanging up.  
   
And then Mac did what you would want every single kid to do in this situation:  
   
He walked out of his room, found his old man, and tearfully said, “Dad I’ve made a *big* mistake”.  
   
And Wayne did what every single parent should do in this situation:  
   
He lovingly put his arms around his son and said “Mate, you’ve done nothing wrong. You are the victim here. Everything is going to be all right.”  
   
And then Mac’s phone rang … again.  
   
Wayne grabbed the phone and, quick as a flash, made something up:  
   
“This is Senior Sergeant Holdsworth from the Mornington Police. STAY AWAY FROM MY BOY!”  
   
The scammer listened, breathing down the line, and then coolly replied:  
   
“I don’t care about you or your son. You can both die.”    
   
And to prove it, he sent the photos to all of Mac’s friends on Snapchat.  
   
Now he was forced to live with the consequences of his actions … which began at footy training the next night. (Thankfully, his coach turned it into an educational session for the boys on the dangers of sending explicit photos.)  
   
The next few months were understandably rough for Mac.   
   
Yet, at dinner one night, Mac was back to his old self, joking with his sister and laughing at Wayne’s dad-jokes. Things had turned the corner, Wayne thought. As Mac went off to bed that night he told his old man that he was excited to put on his L-plates in the morning.  
   
And then Mac went to his room and killed himself.  
   
The next morning, Wayne opened Mac’s door and found him dead. He sat there with his son, now cold and lifeless – and his entire world fell apart.  
   
The next few weeks were a blur of heartache and uncontrollable, throbbing pain.  
   
Mac’s funeral was huge – packed to the rafters. After a lifetime of community service and sport, people came from out of the woodwork to give Wayne and his family their heartfelt commiserations.  
   
And then everyone else got back to living their lives, as they must do.  
   
One afternoon Wayne found himself in Mac’s bedroom, gazing at his son’s prized trophy cabinet. He saw something out of the corner of his eye. It was a note. Wayne reached over, picked it up, and sat on his son’s bed and slowly unfolded it:  
   
*Dear Dad,  
   
Things haven’t been the same for me since that photo. I’m really embarrassed. I’ve let you down.  
   
I am so sorry.  
   
Love, Mac*